

17 December 2008

Ms Therese Gillespie
Corporate Director for Children and Young people
South Gloucestershire Council
Bowling Hill
Chipping Sodbury
South Gloucestershire
BS37 6JX

Dear Ms Gillespie

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in South Gloucestershire Council 2008

This letter summarises the findings of the 2008 annual performance assessment (APA) for your council. The evaluations and judgements in the letter draw on a range of data and information which covers the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008. As you know, the APA is not based on an inspection of your services and, therefore, can only provide a snapshot based on the evidence considered. As such, I am grateful to you for assuring the quality of the data provided.

Performance is judged on a four point scale as detailed in the handbook. I should emphasise that the grades awarded are based on an overall 'best fit' model. For instance, an outstanding judgement of Grade 4 reflects that overall most aspects, but not necessarily all, of the services in the area are working very well. We know that one of the features of outstanding provision is the drive for greater improvement and no council would suggest, and nor would Ofsted, that a judgement of outstanding indicates that everything is perfect. Similarly within a judgement of inadequate overall, Grade 1, there could be some aspects of the overall service that are adequate or even good. Judgements are made in a rounded way, balancing all of the evidence and giving due consideration to outcomes, local and national contexts, priorities and decision-making.



The following table sets out the grades awarded for performance in 2008.

Assessment judgement area	APA grade
Overall effectiveness of children's services	3
Being healthy	3
Staying safe	2
Enjoying and achieving	3
Making a positive contribution	3
Achieving economic well-being	3
Capacity to improve, including the management of services for children and young people	3

*Inspectors make judgements based on the following scale
4: outstanding/excellent; 3: good; 2: adequate; 1: inadequate*

Overall effectiveness of children's services

Grade 3

South Gloucestershire Council delivers services for children and young people that are consistently above minimum requirements for users. There is evidence of good practice and effective contributions to the quality of services for children and young people in the community. The council's capacity to improve, including its management of services is good. Effective leadership and targeted planning with key partners have led to planned and continued improvement to the outcomes across most areas.

The council has continued to build on the positive outcomes from last year's APA for being healthy, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being and this is confirmed in the recent JAR report. The judgement of adequate for staying safe is in line with the council's self-assessment and the finding for safeguarding in the 2008 JAR. This represents a lower grade than was achieved in the 2007 APA. However, good progress has been made in setting-in-place procedures and processes to address a range of issues identified in the JAR associated with performance management, data reliability and quality assurance. It is too early for the full impact of these measures to be demonstrated. On the basis of the judgements reached across all Every Child Matters outcomes, together with the council's capacity to improve and management of its services, there is evidence of good overall improvement and good potential to build on progress made. The self-assessment judgement of outstanding for capacity to improve overestimates the council's record for delivering innovative solutions to problems resulting in secure, sustainable and notable improvements, particularly in staying safe.

Being healthy

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

Major strengths

- The achievement in becoming a Beacon Authority for the Healthy Schools Programme with 81.7% of schools achieving National Healthy School status and 100% participation.
- National targets for health assessments for looked after children have been surpassed and performance is better than the averages achieved in all councils. Particularly good work in this regard is being carried out in the council's secure children's home by the looked after children health nurse.
- Good access to child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) for all children and young people.

<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Underdeveloped approach of the partnership for the screening for Chlamydia amongst the teenage population. ▪ Inconsistent rate of reduction in teenage pregnancy and the increased and high incidence of terminations. |
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Staying safe

Grade 2

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. This is in line with the council's self-assessment. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

<p>Major strengths</p>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Effective work with looked after children has secured good placement stability and performance exceeds similar councils. ▪ Good use of fostering with family and friends mean that a larger percentage of looked after children are secured in family placements than in all other councils. Good performance is also achieved in the use of Special Guardianship. ▪ The quality of the fostering service which was judged outstanding in its recent inspection. |
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<p>Important weaknesses and areas for development</p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The timeliness of initial assessments is below similar councils. ▪ The number of core assessments undertaken is significantly below national figures. ▪ Good practice guidance in relation to case summaries and chronologies in social care files is not yet embedded. |
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Enjoying and achieving

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

<p>Major strengths</p>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The school improvement service provides schools with good support. Effective support has led to fixed term exclusions in secondary schools declining significantly. ▪ Outcomes at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 are well above the national average and higher than similar councils. ▪ The council achieved Beacon status in 2008 for 'Improving Outcomes for |
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Children in Care.’ The attendance of looked after children is very good and attainment at age 16 is generally good.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Standards attained by children and young people at the end of Key Stage 4 remain below national averages and the performance in similar councils.
- The percentage of statements of special educational needs issued within 18 weeks including exceptions is well below average and in the lowest quartile of all councils.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council’s analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

Major strengths

- Good involvement by young people in planning, development and evaluation of the council’s work. Vulnerable young people are supported well in order to give their views.
- Excellent overall performance in prevention of offending including re-offending. The council has the lowest re-offending rate in the south west region.
- Consistently good performance in supporting children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities as well as looked after children to take part in reviews of their care needs.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Children and young people are insufficiently informed about how their views have influenced developments.

Achieving economic well-being

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council’s analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

Major strengths

- The strong 14–19 partnership developments leading to participation in post-16 learning which is consistently better than average, and rising faster than national and similar councils.
- Pathway planning for looked after children is effective and a higher proportion of care leavers are in education, employment or training than in similar councils.
- Good progress compared to similar councils in the improvement in participation

rates amongst young people at risk of not being engaged in education, employment or training means that its 2010 target has already been achieved.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Post-16 achievement continues to be below average.
- The arrangements for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to develop independent living skills are insufficiently developed.

Capacity to improve, including the management of children’s services

Grade 3

The council’s capacity to improve its services for children and young people is good and its management of these services is also good. Outcomes for service users are good in all Every Child Matters outcomes except staying safe which is adequate. This is in line with the council’s self-assessment. Since the last APA the council has made progress against most recommendations. However, the JAR report, recently published in September 2008, identified areas of important weakness relating to the council’s performance in staying safe. Although a good action plan to address the recommendations has been developed and is beginning to be acted upon, it is too early to identify evidence of sustainable impact and outcomes. There is a good Children and Young People’s Plan based upon a comprehensive assessment of need. Service delivery implementation plans are now written in a style that enables impact and outcomes to be monitored and evaluated and work is underway to ensure that all existing plans comply with this standard. Work is also ongoing to assure the integrity of data used to support planning. The capacity to deliver services is good and good value for money is achieved. Where gaps in services in priority areas are identified effective and speedy resolution is expedited. Workforce planning has been effective and has enabled the council and its partners to respond in timely and flexible ways to changes in demand for services. Councillors are committed to actions that will maximise the life opportunities of all children and young people. They are appropriately included in priority statements and plans incorporate goals for educational attainment and progress. Children and young people have a wide range of opportunities to contribute and work is progressing to ensure that the impact of their contributions is evaluated and fed back.

Major strengths

- Strong leadership of children’s services by senior managers, councillors and partners.
- A good Children and Young People’s Plan that is underpinned by a comprehensive assessment of need.
- Services provide good value for money but are sufficiently flexible to enable new demands to be responded to by a well trained and adaptable multi-agency workforce.

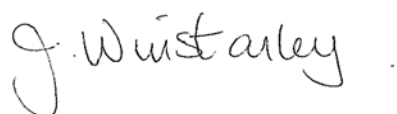
Important weaknesses and areas for development

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The reduction in performance in relation to staying safe since the 2007 APA.▪ Underdeveloped quality assurance and performance management arrangements. |
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The children's services grade is the performance rating for the purpose of section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will also provide the score for the children and young people service block in the comprehensive performance assessment to be published by the Audit Commission.

We are grateful for the information you provided to support this process and for the time given by you and your colleagues during the assessment.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juliet Winstanley".

Juliet Winstanley
Divisional Manager, Local Services Inspection